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Ensuring education for all in Rajasthan: Highlighting the obstacles

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Ensuring education for all in Rajasthan: Highlighting the obstacles

The extent to which India will be able to successfully harness its demographic dividend depends significantly on the situation of its youth, notably on the levels of education and market-oriented skills they attain. While many states have made progress on the education front, many other states, including Rajasthan have lagged behind.

Looking at the current educational situation of youth in Rajasthan, this policy brief argues that significant investments in terms of appropriate policies and programmes are required to enable the state to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, harness its demographic dividend and enable its youth to participate in and benefit from global development.

The study

Data are drawn from the *Youth in India: Situation and Needs* study, a sub-nationally representative study undertaken for the first time in India of key transitions experienced by young people in six states of India, including Rajasthan. The study included a representative survey of youth in both rural and urban settings. Respondents included unmarried women and men and married women aged 15–24 and, in view of the paucity of married men in these ages, married men aged 15–29.

In Rajasthan, the survey was conducted in 2007. A total of 10,002 married and unmarried young men and women were interviewed in the survey. These included 1,886 married young men, 2,129 unmarried young men, 2,603 married young women and 3,384 unmarried young women. This brief is based on data obtained from 2,974 young men and 5,987 young women aged 15–24.

Achieving universal education: how far have youth in Rajasthan come?

School enrolment was far from universal

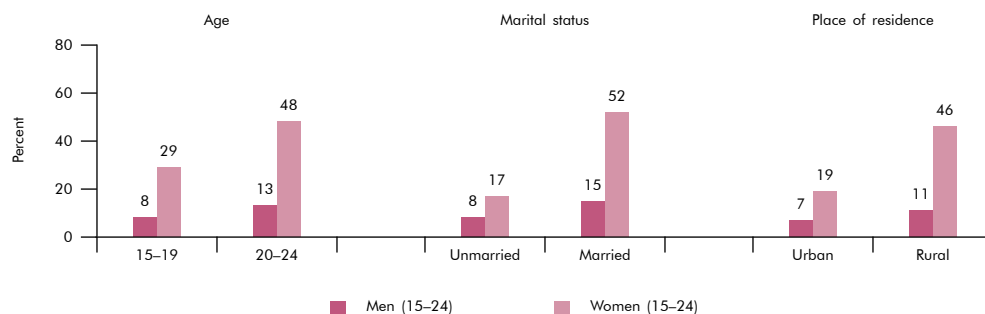
Findings from the Youth Study indicate that schooling was far from universal among young people, particularly young women in Rajasthan; indeed, one in ten young men (10%) and as many as two in five young women (38%) had never been to school. There are, however, some encouraging signs of change—while 13% of young men aged 20–24 had never been enrolled in school, this percentage fell to 8% among those aged 15–19. Increasing enrolment was even more impressive among young women: while almost half of those aged 20–24 had never been to school (48%), this percentage fell to 29% among the younger cohort. While these are impressive trends, the fact is that even among the younger cohort (aged 15–19), too many young men and women had never been to school.

While young women were clearly more disadvantaged than young men, findings indicate that among young women, the married and those in rural areas were far more disadvantaged than the unmarried and those in urban areas. Half of married young women (52%) had never been to school, compared to one in six unmarried young women (17%). Likewise, almost half of young women in rural areas (46%) compared to one-fifth of those from urban settings (19%) had never been to school.

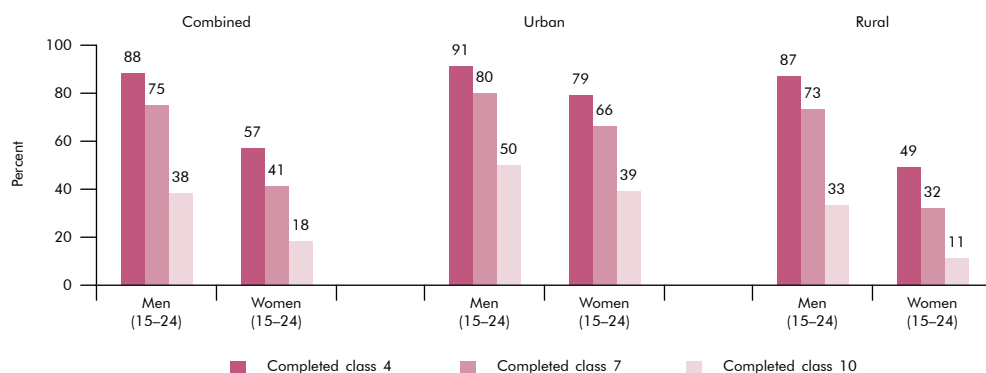
Educational milestones are achieved by relatively few youth

Not only was school enrolment limited, but relatively small proportions of youth had completed such milestones as Classes 4, 7 and 10. Again,

Percentage of youth who had never been to school, according to age, marital status and place of residence



Percentage of youth who had completed Classes 4, 7 and 10



young women were particularly disadvantaged. Just about three in five young women (57%) had completed Class 4 and just two in five (41%) had completed Class 7. In contrast, 88% and 75% of young men had completed Classes 4 and 7, respectively. As with school enrolment, rural youth, particularly rural young women, were far more disadvantaged than their urban counterparts in terms of completion of Classes 4 and 7. Among rural young women, just half (49%) had completed Class 4 and just one-third (32%) had completed Class 7, compared to 79% and 66%, respectively, among young women in urban areas.

Fewer than two in five young men (38%) and fewer than one in five young women (18%) had completed 10 or more years of education. Indeed, even among those aged 18 and above, only 43% of young men and 19% of young women had completed secondary school.

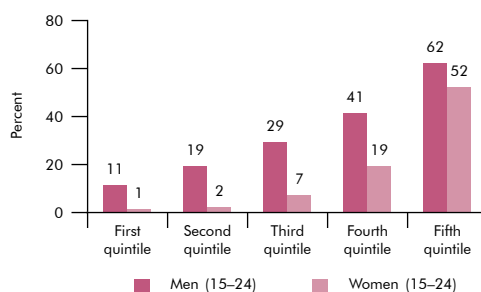
Of note is the striking difference in the proportion of young people who had completed 10 or more years of education by economic status of young people's households, as measured by wealth quintiles (with the first quintile representing households of the lowest wealth status and the fifth quintile representing households of the highest wealth status). Differences by economic status were much wider than either gender differences or differences by rural-urban residence. For example, among young men, just 11% of those from households in the poorest quintile had completed 10 or more years of schooling, compared to 62% of those from households in the wealthiest quintile. Among young women, just 1% of those in the poorest quintile, compared to 52% of those in the wealthiest quintile, had completed 10 or more years of education.

What are the leading obstacles that inhibit youth from reaching educational milestones?

Poverty's grip keeps young people out of school

Leading among factors that inhibited school enrolment and completion were economic reasons (work on the family farm or business, wage earning

Percentage of youth who had completed secondary school, according to household economic status



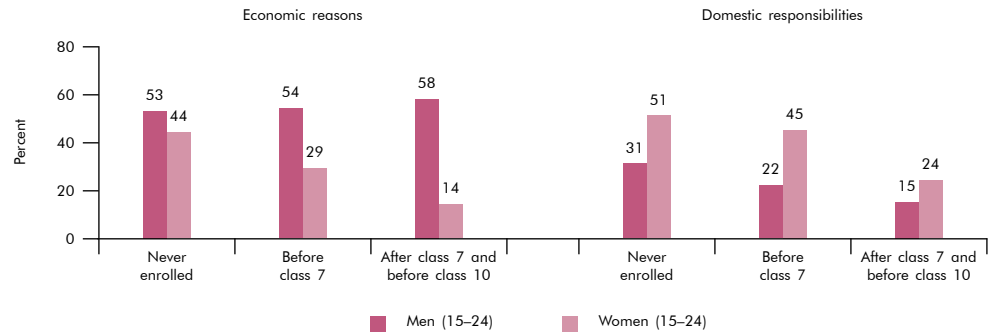
work and family poverty, ie., the family could not afford to keep the respondent in school) and among young women, a related factor, namely domestic responsibilities as well. Indeed, among young men, economic factors were the most commonly cited reason for never being enrolled in school, as well as for discontinuing schooling at each level of education. For example, more than half of young men (53%) who had never been to school reported economic reasons, as did 54% and 58% of those who discontinued before completing Classes 7 and 10, respectively. Young women were far less likely to report economic reasons, and it is notable that as progressively higher milestones were attained, economic reasons became progressively less prominent among them: For example, while 44% of young women who had never been to school reported that they were not enrolled for economic reasons, this percentage fell to 29% and 14%, respectively, among those who discontinued their education before completing Classes 7 and 10.

Domestic responsibilities were cited, as expected, by more young women than men. Half of all young women (51%) compared to one-third of young men (31%) who had never been to school cited domestic responsibilities as the reason. Domestic reasons were also cited by 45% of young women and one-fifth (22%) of young men who had discontinued schooling before completing Class 7. In short, domestic responsibilities became progressively less prominent obstacles to schooling as progressively higher milestones were attained.



POLICY BRIEF Ensuring education for all in Rajasthan: Highlighting the obstacles

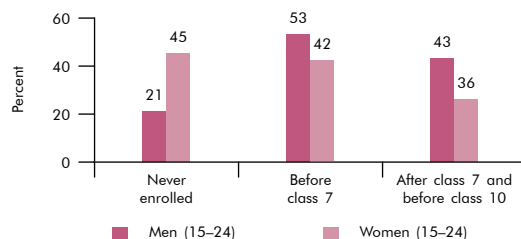
Of those who had never enrolled/discontinued schooling, percentage of youth who cited economic constraints, and the burden of domestic responsibilities



Unfavourable attitudes to education deter many

Unfavourable attitudes and perceptions of youth and their parents regarding education (for example, that education was unnecessary or the respondent was not interested in schooling) were also a key factor that inhibited many youth from getting enrolled in the first place or continuing schooling. One in five young men (21%) who had never enrolled in school cited attitude and perception-related reasons and this proportion increased to 43–53% among those who discontinued their education in Classes 7 and 10. Among young women, more than two in five (45%) of those who had never been to school reported these reasons, and proportions reporting unfavourable attitudes and perceptions as reasons for discontinuation fell mildly among those who discontinued schooling before completing Classes 7 and 10 (36–42%).

Of those who had never enrolled/discontinued schooling, percentage of youth who cited unfavourable attitudes regarding schooling

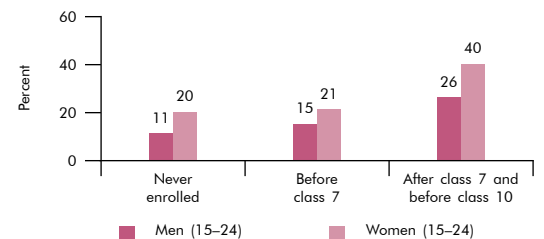


School-related issues are significant, particularly for young women

Although school-related issues were infrequently cited as the reason for never attending school, one in ten young men and one in five young women so reported. School related reasons became more important factors accounting for discontinuation among youth who discontinued their education before Classes 7 and 10, respectively. For example, 21% of young women who discontinued their education before completing Class 7 and 40% of those who discontinued their education after completing Class 7 and before completing Class 10

reported that such school related factors as distance and failure to pass their school examination had prevented them from continuing in school. Although fewer young men reported school related obstacles as reasons for school discontinuation, among them too, school related reasons became more important reasons for school discontinuation among those who discontinued their education before Classes 7 (15%) and 10 (26%), respectively. Indeed, as many as one-quarter (24%) of young men and one-fifth (19%) of young women reported that failure to pass their school examination was the main reason for discontinuing their education after completing Class 7 and before completing Class 10.

Of those who had never enrolled/discontinued schooling, percentage of youth who cited school-related barriers



Pressure to marry early adds to young women's disadvantage

Many young women but hardly any young men reported that marriage had interrupted their schooling. Indeed, one in seven young women who had discontinued their education before completing Class 10 reported doing so in order to marry.

Are schools equipped with basic amenities?

Findings suggest that irrespective of the level of education that youth have reached, the schools attended by many youth lacked basic amenities. Although drinking water was available in most schools, toilet facilities, so essential for girls in particular, were not available to many—as many as 35% of young men and 21% of young women who had discontinued their education in

Classes 1–7. Among those who were studying or had discontinued at higher levels, however, almost all had access to toilet facilities. Library facilities were less likely to be available: Just 74% and 82% of young men and women who were studying in Classes 8–10 at the time of interview reported that library facilities were available, for example.

It is notable, moreover, that considerable proportions of youth required private coaching—one-fifth of young men and more than one-quarter of young women studying in Classes 8–10 at the time of the interview.

Programme recommendations

Findings indicate that several challenges remain in ensuring universal access to primary and secondary education and thereby achieving Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. The recently enacted Right to Education Bill has made education compulsory for all children. Moreover, several central and state government programmes are ongoing, including the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, the *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan*, the Rajasthan Education Initiative and the mid-day meal scheme, that are intended to encourage school enrolment and retention. What is required now are that policy commitments are met and programmes are effectively implemented. While the achievement of universal school enrolment and primary school completion are key goals, the importance of high school education in enabling youth to make a successful transition to adulthood underscores the need, at the same time, for efforts to overcome barriers to high school completion.

Address economic pressures

Efforts must be made to address the economic pressures that dissuade parents from enrolling their children in school and from keeping them in school once enrolled. Conditional grants and targeted subsidies that encourage school enrolment and completion among disadvantaged groups need to be considered.

Raise aspirations of youth and parents regarding education

Activities are needed that are directed at parents that raise their aspirations for the education of their children and encourage greater parental involvement in their children's education. There is also a need to incorporate livelihood skills building models within the school setting and provide opportunities for those in school to gain market-driven job skills that will raise the aspirations of youth regarding their education and career. The Rajasthan Education Initiative's proposal to expand the curriculum to provide information

and communication technology (ICT) skills to secondary schools students (Department of Education, Government of Rajasthan, n.d) is clearly a step in this direction.

Address school-related barriers

Activities must address school-related barriers, notably, distance to school, and poor infrastructure and quality of education. A particularly relevant school level barrier for young women was distance to school. Attention must be paid to ensure that schools, particularly at primary level, are accessible to all youth and that basic amenities are available in all schools. The state government has launched various schemes to address the barrier posed by distance (for example, the establishment of girls' schools, the provision of bicycles to girls studying in distant schools, provision of transport vouchers to those living far from schools and scholarships to girls from families living below the poverty line). However, it is important that the effectiveness of these schemes is evaluated and promising lessons are assimilated and scaled up. Given the large proportions of youth reporting that schooling had been interrupted because they were required for work on the family farm or business or for housework, efforts are needed to adjust school timings, or to establish evening schools. Such efforts will enable children to accommodate their work commitments without sacrificing their education. Moreover, investments in improving the quality of the schooling experience are needed that focus on providing better training of teachers and ensuring greater accountability among teachers.

Eliminate the practice of early marriage

Findings indicating that early marriage was an important reason for school discontinuation among young women who discontinued their education before completing Class 10—emphasise the fact that programme commitments outside the education sector are also critical to the achievement of universal school completion. Specifically required are programmes that seek to critically examine norms and practices surrounding marriage and to eliminate the practice of early marriage. Explorations of subsidies and cash transfers that link school retention with delayed marriage among girls are needed.

Provide a second chance to obtain a basic education to young women left behind

Findings suggesting that married young women and rural young women remain considerably disadvantaged in terms of school enrolment and completion call for interventions that would give these sub-groups a second chance to obtain a basic education.



IIPS
International Institute for
Population Sciences, Mumbai

 **Population Council**

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For additional information on the study, please send an e-mail to iipsyouth@rediffmail.com or info-india@popcouncil.org